

Testimony of Mary Cecchinato regarding HB 5037

Good evening, Sen. Osten, Rep. Walker, and members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Mary Cecchinato and I am the Executive Director of the not-for-profit Torrington Child Care Center, Inc, and Co-Chair of the State Funded Child Care Center Director's Forum representing 102 early care and education child care centers (CDC's) in Connecticut. CDC's have provided high quality, affordable early care and education to over 4,300 children in 53 municipalities since 1968.

I am submitting testimony today on the Governor's proposed budget for the Office of Early Childhood. There needs to be an increase in the Early Care and Education line item. Our Early Childhood Centers have been under funded for a very long time and it has now become a crisis in Connecticut. Early Childhood Centers are an essential part of Connecticut's infrastructure. This became apparent during the pandemic when many centers closed due to lack of funds and no staff. We received a very minimal increase last year which brought our funding equal to School Readiness. That increase did not even cover the changes in minimum wage.

We are required to be accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children. Therefore, our staff have Baccalaureate and Associate degrees in Early Childhood Education. However, chronic underfunding by the state means that they do not get compensated for their education or quality work they perform every day. We did receive a stabilization grant made possible by the federal ARPA funds. That helped pay for the added costs related to the pandemic and enabled us to give our staff a one time bonus, but those funds are spent and now we face dramatic increases in wages offered by other employers.

I was very concerned when one of my teachers who was making \$15.00 came to me and said she was offered \$18.00 an hour at another center and was going to leave. We were able to compensate her a little more but we're not sure how we will be able to sustain the increase without more funding. We need an ongoing financial commitment from the State of Connecticut for Early Childhood programs to continue to serve the children and families of our state. These children are our future and they deserve nothing less than the best start in life.

We need increased funding now so that we can pay our current staff livable wages and be able to attract new qualified teachers.

Thank you for taking the time to read my testimony on the Governor's proposed budget.

Sincerely,

Mary Cecchinato

Mary Cecchinato
Executive Director
Torrington Child Care Inc.
Co-Chair Director's Forum